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The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

No. 85, Vol. viii.]

BELFAST, JANUARY 1st, 1888.

[For Gratuitous Circulation.

THE Rev. J. C. Street acknowledges, with thanks, the receipt of the following contributions in aid of the gratuitous publication of the *Chronicle and Index*:—

Mrs. Watson, Newcastle,	...	£0	10	0
Mrs. Boys, Brighton,	...	0	5	0
Mrs. Brydon, Greenisland,	...	0	2	6
Mrs. Macrory, Belfast,	...	0	2	0

Further contributions are needed.

THE Treasurer of the Unitarian Society begs to acknowledge receipt of the following subscriptions for 1887:—

Mr. D. Bulmer,	...	...	£0	5	0
Mrs. Bulmer,	...	...	0	5	0
Miss Martin,	...	...	0	2	6

All subscriptions are now due, and are much needed by the Treasurer.

THE subjects which were dealt with by the Rev. J. C. Street at his Sunday Evening Services, during the month of December, were as follows:—

Jesus, the Teacher.

Jesus, the Martyr.

Jesus, the Saviour.

Jesus, the Son of God.

The series of sermons on Jesus, which has now ended, has been listened to with great attention, and many persons have testified that they were enabled better to understand the "Great Nazarene" than they had done before.

WE commend to the attention of Sunday School teachers and superintendents Mr. Hood's

excellent little Catechism, entitled "A Free Christian Catechism." It is well adapted for use in Sunday Schools and families, for it gives religious instruction in such a way that there is nothing to unlearn as children grow older.

IN entering upon the eighth year of its existence, the *Chronicle and Index* of the Unitarian Society, Belfast, has to tell a story of successful work extending over a period of seven years, and to indulge in the hope that a career of even larger usefulness is before it in the year 1888. The Unitarian Society itself is a symbol of the progress which the *Chronicle* has been representing. For a long time past it was not possible to obtain Unitarian and other progressive religious literature from the ordinary booksellers, and our various periodicals were not supplied by them. Now the whole order is changed. We have had to keep up a special Depository for the sale of our books, and the supply of our periodicals. This is no longer necessary. We are making arrangements to do this through one of the largest booksellers in town, and shall thus be able to do more and better for our friends and subscribers than we could by continuing our Depository. And the Society itself will be able to do other and better liberal work in the publication of books and tracts and the extension of our principles through the press, the platform, and the pulpit. But the *Chronicle and Index* will continue its career so long as we have the assurance that its work is appreciated. Now is an excellent time for friends to render it solid financial support.

THERE is but little prospect of the great breach in the Baptist body being closed. Efforts are being made, but, at their very inception, they seem destined to fail. The controversy originated by Mr. Spurgeon strikes so deeply down into the traditional theology of the Evangelical bodies that no mere words of kindness and good-will will bring about union among those who are shewn to have fundamental differences. It is possible that a temporary peace may be patched up; but the break between those who cling to the traditional theology, and those who are following the guidance of God's spirit to-day, is inevitable. Men must gravitate to their places. Some are evidently to be the dead weights—drags on the wheels of progress, while others are obedient to the voice of God which bids them "go forward."

WE have received from the Sunday School Association the yearly volume of "Young Days" and the "Sunday School Helper" for 1887, and we have the greatest pleasure in commending them to the attention of our readers. Both volumes are of exceptional interest. In "Young Days" both the illustrations and the literary matter are good. Our children could not have a more delightful book. Eye and mind are alike charmed and satisfied. The volume deserves a wide circulation. The "Helper" is the best annual for Sunday School teachers and for heads of families we have ever seen. It is simply packed with treasures. It thoroughly deserves its name. Any teacher who uses it is wonderfully equipped for his work, and cannot fail both to interest and instruct his class. We thank the Association for giving us such excellent volumes.

THE first half of the Session of the Mutual Improvement Association, Rosemary Street, has now terminated. On December 5th, Mons. Dubois read a paper on the "Resources of Civilization," which called forth an animated discussion. On the 12th, Mr. W. J. Sloane read a carefully prepared paper entitled, "Some thoughts on Atheism," which also led to a very searching and helpful discussion. On the

19th, the programme was "Music and Readings," and an enjoyable evening was passed. The music was contributed by the Misses Fisher, Street, Roche, Scott, Stronge, and Bulmer, and by Messrs. Shaw and H. J. Fisher, and the readings were by the President and Mr. Gilliland. It was announced that the programme for the remainder of the Session was nearly completed, and that the first meeting would take place on January 9th. The programme for the present month will be found in our advertising columns.

HOW I LEFT ORTHODOXY.

BY JAMES C. STREET.

No. 3—*Continued.*

I found that all these notions about Hell came from the Bible. My guides said it was infallible, and I did not question what they said. But I sought its pages. I soon found myself confronted with proofs that the matter was not so clear as it had been reported to me—that there was room for further examination and consideration. I pondered my course. Clearly I saw some teachings that left no doubt in my mind that there was a Hell, and that it was everlasting. The language was clear and appalling. If all the language in the Bible was of the same character then I must either accept the doctrine unreservedly, ghastly, and unjust as it seemed to be, or I must set aside the Bible altogether and deny its authority, and the validity of its teachings. But that precise issue was not yet raised, for I found passages which were inconsistent with this dogma, and which by no ingenuity of interpretation could be made to agree with it. I could not make the teachings harmonise, I could not meet with anyone who was able to do so, and therefore I was driven to make a choice, and to decide for myself which was most likely to be true. I appealed unconsciously to a tribunal which, ever since, I have found to be the highest in the world, greater than Books, Priests, Churches, Assemblies, or Creeds,—the tribunal of the human soul—its reason,

its conscience, its heart, and I accepted the decision of this tribunal. *Reason* assured me that from the evidence of the Bible itself the weight of testimony was against the doctrine of an Eternal Hell, and that the highest and best utterances of the venerable book were in favour of a more merciful and just way of dealing with sinners; and its judgment was confirmed by all I could see even in the dealings of men with one another in the world. Moreover, it seemed altogether contrary to reason that God's work should be such a stupendous failure as it would be if His designs and wishes should be absolutely frustrated, and that He who wished for the happiness of all His children should be compelled to allow in His universe a place of torment where the agonies of His own children should endure for ever. Reason stood aghast at such a conclusion, and decided against it. And *conscience* rose up stern, severe, and just in its condemnation, and said this could not be. All the highest and best in humanity stood forth in protest against it, and in face of a listening universe sent forth its righteous condemnation of the doctrine; while the human *heart* sent out one universal cry that it was unnatural, inhuman, below the level of the least noble of men, and therefore unspeakably degrading to every conception which we can attach to the idea of God.

What, then, was I to do? How was I to make my choice? I had no further difficulty. The scales fell from my eyes. The darkness rolled away; grim and ghostly shapes perished in the blaze of day. I was, once and for ever, emancipated from the belief in Hell. Now it was that I began to hope what has been since so beautifully expressed by another (Morris):—

If thou shalt be in heart a child,
Forgiving, tender, meek, and mild,
Though with light stains of earth defiled,
Oh, soul, it shall be well.

It shall be well with thee indeed,
Whate'er thy race, thy tongue, thy creed;
Thou shalt not lose thy fitting meed,
It shall be surely well.

Not where, nor how, nor when we know,
Nor by what stages thou shalt grow,
We may but whisper faint and low,
It shall be surely well.

It shall be well with thee, oh, soul,
Tho' the heavens wither like a scroll;
Tho' sun and moon forget to roll,
Oh, soul, it shall be well.

“THE NEW PATH. FROM TRINITY TO UNITY. FROM
TYRANNY TO FATHERHOOD.”

No. 4.

“Thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,
But in the darkness and the cloud,
As over Sinai's peaks of old,
While Israel made their gods of gold,
Altho' the trumpet blew so loud.”—TENNYSON.

Many a time as we are journeying on life's road we reach places where different paths open out, all alike unknown to us, and leading into fresh realms, and we have to choose along which we will go. If we are content, without questioning, to go as the majority of our fellow-travellers go we shall have very little difficulty, for at every turn of the road there will be a great stream of persons moving in the same direction, and all we have to do is to huddle close among them and we shall be borne along. We may, if we keep our eyes open at all, see a few others who are separating themselves from the crowd and turning into different paths, and, if we listen, we may hear them jeered at and derided for going out of the common track; but, at any rate, we shall know that there are other tracks, and travellers who are making their way into them.

Sometimes these less frequented roads are entered most reluctantly, and with a painful sense that they will lead away from old companionships and associations, and bring about isolation and sorrow. But they are entered upon from a high sense of duty and in obedience to the dictates of conscience. Not many persons turn aside from friends, companions, and kindred with a light heart and a cheerful spirit. Such persons are always the exceptions. The majority of those who leave the crowded highways of life are sober-minded, serious men and women, who, following the guidance of the inner light, are compelled to go whither the Spirit of God shall lead.

I have at various times in my life history had to leave those with whom I had been associated in order that I might be true to myself, and obedient to the authority of conscience. I cannot say that I have ever wantonly snapped old ties, or broken away from sacred associations. It has always been a painful process to me; and certainly it has never brought me social status, popularity, wealth, or position. Had I wanted these, and been willing to pay the price for them, I do not think I should have been prevented from obtaining them. But these aims have never been before me, and I have never been disappointed that I did not reach them.

You will have seen how I broke away from my Calvinist and Methodist friends, and what questions had risen before me as I turned aside from them.

I had given up Predestination with much that it involved. I had given up a belief that the Bible was, as a whole, in favour of the doctrine of an eternal Hell; I had broken away from the authority of my teachers, and found that, like other men and women, they were fallible—a great doubt had grown up in my mind as to the infallibility of the Bible itself—and I had begun clearly to recognise that when I wanted to find my highest court of appeal for the determination of any issues of a religious character, I must leave all that is outside, all that the world has called authoritative, and go to the tribunal of my own Reason, Conscience, and Affections.

When I had reached this position an event occurred which had the greatest influence upon my life. By a series of circumstances, into which I need not here enter, I was privileged for a brief period to attend the day-school in connection with the Unitarian Chapel at Nottingham. In a short time this led to my attending the Sunday School, and after another interval this was followed by my attendance upon the Sunday services. These great changes in my outward circumstances, following as they did the mental history I have already described, naturally exercised a profound influence upon me. I must, however, clearly state that I do not

remember that any teachers ever set forth before me the differences, whatever they might be, between those who worshipped in the Unitarian Chapel, and those among whom I have been brought up. The day-school was purely secular, and not a word was ever said, or a thing done by which the most acute and observing could trace the religious opinions of the teachers. In the Sunday School we were specially favoured in the character and social standing and culture of the teachers; but I do not remember that in any class to which I ever belonged, or from the superintendent's desk, any information was ever given about Unitarian theology. The teachers won us to themselves by the most loving offices and care. The Sunday School was a very happy place, and everything belonging to it tended to promote a cheerful feeling among teachers and scholars. But associated with it were so many institutions and influences of a pleasant character that we were all won to it in the most perfect manner. Our teachers invited us to their homes, we had special gardens provided for us to cultivate and enjoy, games were arranged during the week-days in which teachers and scholars united, and there was such a spirit of unity and concord among us that the influence of the teachers upon all the scholars became most powerful and persuasive. We did not hear very much about Theology, but we felt very powerfully the influence of Religion. Our love was called forth, and the persuasiveness of sweet and noble lives was felt in the very depths of our being. I attended with the greatest regularity. I graduated in all the higher classes, and for a long time had the privilege of attendance upon Mr. Carpenter's own class. He was a man utterly different from the preachers I had ever met before. He was stately, dignified, scholarly, and cold. There was no glow and enthusiasm about him, and I do not think he ever excited much warmth or enthusiasm in others. But he commanded from young and old, from rich and poor, from scholar and workman, from saint and sinner alike, the most profound respect. I do not think I ever before or since knew a man who was so looked

up to, trusted, and respected. For myself, I can say that I used to look up to him as to a model man, whose clear, calm course was steered with even keel over all the seas and currents of life, and who by some power within was always guided into a serene and sheltered haven. I never felt that he was a priest, or that priestly functions in any sense belonged to him. He did not profess to be, even in matters of scholarship, an authority, but always spoke and acted like a man who was steadily finding his way. It was not, therefore, because of any enthusiasm felt about him or inspired by him that he exercised any influence over me or any of his people. We honoured and respected him, and in a calm and quiet way we loved him, but he did not press his personality with any overpowering force upon us. His influence was that inspired by a serene, lofty, and devoted life, by a calm, inquiring, and investigating nature, and by a perception on our part that he was bound by no foregone conclusions, but steadily worked out his own thoughts, patiently examined every question for himself, and was simply obedient to the light that was in him. He was a true theologian and a profound student of Theology. Every winter he used to take up, monthly, some topics of Theology, and discuss them publicly in his pulpit. At his usual evening services the attendance was generally small, for he was a dull and uninteresting preacher, but at his lectures he always had a large and attentive audience, composed of the *élite* thinkers of the town. Men were desirous of hearing his unimpassioned treatment of topics, which always seemed when spoken of by others to be aglow with living fire. He seemed like a reasoning machine. He always stated his opponent's case with singular clearness and in the most attractive form. If anything he was more than just. No man could charge him with unfairness, and no man ever felt angry or irritated with him for misrepresentation or offensive dogmatism. He argued fairly; he paid due respect to the strength of those against whom he contended, and he stated his own views with a precision that could not be surpassed, and gave his reasons and the

evidence for them in a way that left nothing to be desired. You always felt when he had finished that you had before you the materials from which you might fitly form a judgment on the merits of the matter in controversy.

It was in this new atmosphere and among these new influences that I now found myself. It was a great change to me. I had escaped altogether from the feverish world in which I had hitherto lived; the questions that had so terribly perplexed and haunted me dropped out of my life. I felt no more the grim phantoms of horror haunting me, and I lived in a healthy, natural, human way, as if life was worth having, and its sunshine meant happiness. The pleasant influences of the social life of the Sunday School, the delights of our gardening pursuits, working in early morn amid singing birds and sunny skies, the pleasures of home intercourse with teachers and friends, and the calm atmosphere of our Sunday services, combined to make me feel that I was travelling along a new and delightful road, that the earth was beautiful, that my fellow-creatures were advancing in happiness, that clouds and great darkness had rolled away, and that the face of God was beaming lovingly upon his children.

All this time I was being quietly led into a new life. Though I was really not in a region where Theology was very much talked about, I was yet carefully reading books of Theology. We had a capital library at our command. It was open to scholars, teachers, and members of the congregation. I was always fond of books. Reading was my greatest enjoyment. I had not very much time for it, for my work was absorbing and straining, but I was never without a book. I read as I walked through the streets; I read as I sat at my meals; I climbed up a favourite tree very early in the summer mornings and read among its branches; there was always a book under my pillow. I read at night until my candle spluttered into darkness, and I was at my book before the cock crowed in the morning. Reading was my delight. Naturally I read many books on matters pertaining to religion. Religion was a great reality to me. My surroundings all through my life made me look upon it as the supreme

interest. All that was mightiest, most important, and most interesting belonged to it. I was always attracted to it. But my old friends and associates whom I still met and conversed with made me feel that my new world was not theirs, that I was among a new people, and they assured me I was likely to be led into deadly error. Perhaps my mother was now and then anxious about me—indeed, I am sure she must have been—but she saw I was interested, absorbed, learning, teaching, growing in intelligence, appreciated by good men and women, working in companionship with upright and honourable people, and I think, upon the whole, she was content to let me have my way, feeling, I dare say, that after all God's will must be done and His intentions absolutely fulfilled. And so my course lay before me.

Now it was that the issues of the Unitarian controversy rose fully and fairly before me. Though I had not understood, as I have since discovered no one else ever did understand, the doctrine of the Trinity, I had, all my life, until these later years, lived among people who were Trinitarians. It so chanced that in my early days, among my special friends, though I suppose they were all Trinitarians, the doctrine of the Trinity was not uppermost, and was not very much talked about. It was assumed, and taken for granted, as though no question had ever been raised about it. I never knew what it meant, or had had carefully put before me the evidence by which it was sustained, and it had never been thrust before me as a matter of major importance. In a sort of way I accepted it, as I accepted so many things, without having thought about it, or paid much heed to it. If any one had asked me did I believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, I suppose I should have answered in the affirmative; and yet, as I now look back upon my mental history, and recall my various states of mind, I am quite sure I never did believe it, and never could have believed it. But among my new surroundings I heard myself described by my former associates as a Unitarian. Now, this description was certainly inaccurate. I was among Unitarians, I

loved them, I found happiness among them. They lifted up my life. They brightened my path. I was glad and proud of their fellowship. But I could not be said to be a Unitarian, for I did not understand the merits of the controversy as between Unitarians and Trinitarians. I found they were in full and hearty sympathy with me in my revolt against Predestination, that they agreed with me in my repugnance to the doctrine of an endless place of torment, that they laid great stress upon the exercise of reason in matters of religion, and that they affirmed man's sonship to God, and so there were bonds of union between us which drew me very close to them, because in accepting these doctrines I had felt the pain of separation from those who had been the friends and companions of my life. But I had not yet looked carefully into the issue as between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Divine Unity.

I turned to the Library. It was neither lectures, nor Sunday School teaching, nor public controversy that led me to study this matter, and I cannot say that any particular person swayed my judgment, or did much more than occasionally guide my steps. I looked over the books of the Library to find the books that bore upon this controversy. I read eagerly, and examined closely. One of the first books that arrested my attention was what was termed the "Liverpool Controversy," where three Unitarian ministers were discussing the great issues with thirteen clergymen of the Church of England. Many of the gravest matters of religion and theology were here discussed with a wealth of beauty and learning that fascinated and entranced me. New fields of thought opened out before me, and in many a direction my heart went singing with delight as I found myself led into sunnier regions of religion than I had ever before heard about. But, for the time being, the stress of my study was as to the doctrine of the Trinity. I read all that was said in its defence by these clergymen. I next read the controversy between Wardlaw and Yates. I read of the great disputes in the North of Ireland, especially between Cooke and Montgomery. I read with

delight the public discussion between Joseph Barker and Mr. Cooke, and also the debate between Bagot and J. Scott Porter. I weighed the evidence as well and as carefully as I could, and I did my best to understand the question at issue. I soon discovered that I had never hitherto had a clear understanding as to what the doctrine of the Trinity was, and that, therefore, I had never yet really been a Trinitarian. I also found that it was impossible to clearly understand any of the definitions of the doctrine put forth by any of its defenders. They spoke of it as a mystery which could not be understood, but must be believed. Somehow I never could believe what I could not in some sense understand. I found that none of the expounders of the doctrine really agreed with each other, that, except when they were quoting some of the creeds, or some passage of Scripture, they greatly diverged from one another, and altogether I found myself unable to form a clear and definite idea as to what the doctrine really was. But I was greatly impressed with the fact that I could not find the word Trinity in the Bible. This greatly amazed me. That a doctrine of such stupendous importance, as it was represented to be, the rejection of which was said to involve everlasting destruction, should be left even unnamed in the Scriptures, awoke within me the gravest possible doubt as to its truthfulness at all. It was not sufficient to answer that it could be found by inference, that by collating, comparing and piece-mealing of texts it could be built up and set forth. This by no means satisfied me. Here, again, came in the feeling that had guided me in an earlier controversy, that of a belief in and love of fair play. It did not seem to be fair play that we should be constrained, under penalty of direst punishments, to believe what was not clearly and in distinct terms authoritatively stated. We were but men and women, with limited powers and resources, and it seemed to me unjust to imperil our salvation through incorrect inferences or blundering interpretations. Besides, when I went into the evidence of texts and inferences I did not find that by any means they pointed in the direction of the Trinity.

Only one passage was cited, which, without naming the doctrine, was said implicitly to set it forth, the famous passage: "There are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one," but this was well known to be an interpolation and a forgery, and had to be given up by the most ardent and most resolute of controversialists. When this was set aside I could find nothing but inferences left, and as I went carefully over the pages of the Old and New Testaments I failed utterly to draw inferences in favour of the Trinity. Passage after passage slipped from under my feet, the ground became every hour more insecure, the argument grew feebler, and I became sensible that the doctrine of the Trinity had never had any real hold upon my mind, that it was foreign to the Hebrew mind and thought, that it had no place in Testaments Old or New, that whatever defence could be found for it was by the ingenious straining of Scriptural passages, a sort of literary mosaic formed from scraps torn out of connection from most distant parts of the Scriptures, and by the strained and artificial arguments of Christian schoolmen who seemed to find in the doctrine of the Trinity a field wherein to exercise their intellectual ingenuity, and to bring forth the most extraordinary paradoxes.

Not in Scripture could I find any real support for or defence of the Trinity; and when I turned to the tribunal of Reason the judgment was clear and explicit. To this tribunal I found the defenders of the doctrine unwilling to go. They said it was a doctrine of revelation, that it was beyond the capacity of the human understanding, and that it must be accepted on authority, and could only be rejected at peril of the soul's destruction. Now I was every day growing more unwilling to allow the influence of external authority in matters of religion and conscience and duty. I pursued my course of looking for light and guidance from within, and brought this, as I brought every other matter, before the tribunal of my own soul. I found there no comprehension of, no justification for, no support of this strange, foreign, and perplexing doctrine. It could not be stated in terms that were not contradictory, it could not be defended by the weapons of reason, it made that faculty stagger and stand aghast; and, altogether, it stood condemned before this tribunal as it seemed to me also to be condemned by Scripture.

(To be continued).

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Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association.

SIXTEENTH SESSION, 1887-88.

The Committee have the pleasure of announcing the following

PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY, 1888.

1888.

Jan. 9—"Compulsory Education," .. Discussion.
" 16—"The Brain and Its Functions," Jas. A. Lindsay, Esq., M.D.
" 23—"Burke, and the Present
Discontent," .. Mr. S. Millin.
" 30—"An English Dictionary," .. Mr. J. H. Aston, M.A.

The Meetings are held on MONDAY EVENINGS at Eight o'clock, in
the Rosemary Street Schools.

MEMBER'S SUBSCRIPTION.—4s. per annum, which entitles to the
use of the Library. Subscriptions for the Sixteenth Session are now
due and should be paid to the Treasurer, D. BULMER, 32, Queen
Street, as early as possible.

The Library will be open at 1 p.m. on Sundays, and on every
Monday Evening during the Session.

ALEX. MILLIGAN, } Hon.
J. H. GILLILAND, } Secs.

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